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KING HELGE

ASLOG

WINBOLT

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KING HELGE

ASLOG

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KING HELGE

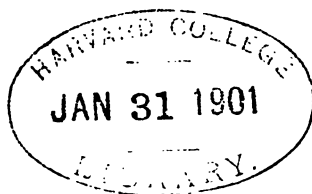
ASLOG

BY
FREDERICK I. WINBOLT



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Preface

The two following short dramas are based upon the Norse Sagas, although I have departed to some extent from the original legends.

Those to whom these sagas are familiar will, I trust, forgive me for so doing, and I fully hope that others who make their first acquaintance with “King Helge” and “Aslog” through the medium of my writings, will not lose any of the charm of the primary version of the sagas.

I believe that I am not alone in finding a peculiar attraction in the old Norse legends, almost all of which have some fundamental, moral lesson to convey.

We gather from them that high principle and high-mindedness were by no means uncommon characteristics of the ancient Scandinavians, and we of to-day can learn not a little, perhaps, from their primitive ideas of honour and of right.

F. I. W.



KING HELGE

KING HELGE

HELGE, . . . *King of Denmark.*

ROLF, . . . *His Son.*

HARALD, . . .

TORSTEN, . . .

KING ADILS, . . .

THORA, . . . *Queen to Helge.*

YRSA, . . .

KING HELGE







KING HELGE

ASLOG

Ye know how Thora e'er has held me back
When, as my love grew fainter in my heart,
I long'd to lead you forth to war again.
And this is the obstruction that shall fall
And ne'er again keep glory from my name ;
No longer shall such darkest shadows cast
Their gloominess upon the land we love,
While all the sunshine of true valiant deeds
Falls dazzlingly upon our enemies !

This woman's tongue of peace and cowardice,
For me and all my warriors shall learn
A silence that shall never broken be.
Unto the island where she once did dwell
Shall she return, and ne'er again be known
As the fair queen of brave and warlike Helge.
Before the sun is up to-morrow morn
Shalt thou, my Harald, sail with her away.
And thou shalt leave her on the lonely isle
Where we did find her. Then shalt thou return
And give thine aid and service to thy king.

Harald—My will, O King, takes ever form from thine,
And what thou askest of me shall be done.

(*Enter Thora.*)

Helge—I thank thee for the love thou bearest me,
But now I pray you both to leave my side,
And bid my courtiers go forth with you :
For there with looks which ill disguise her fear,
Stands Thora. And her eyes have sought me out
That I may know she would have speech with me.

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And I must now confess I love no more ;
For now my heart with sterner things is fill'd,
And love again can find no place therein
To wrap my high desires in slumber's cloak.
Now, hear me, gentle Thora, patiently,
And thou wilt see that wisdom crowns my speech
And the determination of my mind.
My love has died for thee, as I have said,
And if, throughout the years life holds for us
I kept thee ever by my side, in chains,
Each day to find their weight more terrible
More crushing on thy young and gentle heart,
No darkest dungeon could make life so black
Or give so foul an air for thee to breathe.
And therefore, honour tells me thou must go,
For thou shalt know no prison's atmosphere,
And happy hours thou yet again shalt find.

When first I saw thee on that pleasant isle
Thy sunny hours of life no cloud had seen—
And discontent was yet unborn in thee.
To that sweet land of peace shalt thou return,
And there shalt thou forget thy love for me,
That other joys may enter in thy heart,
And other blessings smile upon thy life
To give thee gladness by their kindly aid.
To-morrow morn before the sun appears
Shall Harald take thee from thy loveless land,
And sail with thee to yonder fairy isle,
Where no disturbances can e'er have place
To rouse thee from thy pleasant dreams of peace.

Does my command meet well with thy desire ?

(Thora bows her head, and passes with dignity to the threshold, and then loses control of herself.)

Thora—O breaking heart be strong ! my son—my son !

(Exit Thora.)

(Enter Harald and Torsten.)

Helge—This is a fitting time that ye return,
Torsten, bid all my men come unto me,
That now to them my mind I may unfold.

(Exit Torsten.)

The words are spoken, Harald, to my queen,
And she has nobly borne their heavy weight,
Without the weakness of a woman's tears
To tear away the mask of dignity.
Be ready, then, my Harald, with the dawn
And sail away before the sun is up
To throw its dazzling light upon our deed.

Harald—Does Rolf, thy son, know aught of thine intent ?

Helge—Nay, Harald, and I bid thee seek for him
And whisper it in secret in his ear,
For I have spoken on this theme enough,
And have a mind for less disturbing things.
Now do my men return to me again.

(Enter Torsten, Rolf, and Courtiers.)

Helge—This day shall all your manly hearts feel pride,
For ye are asked again to serve your king.
The years of honey'd peace have run their course

And all their sweetness now is felt no more—
For who would seek his couch again at morn
When sleep has driven weariness away?
Rouse then your valour in your warriors' breasts
And be prepar'd to leave these pleasant shores
For foreign lands—where bravery shall give
The crown of conquest unto ev'ry man.

And thou, my son, shalt also come with me,
And learn, as other men, to use thy sword;
O let the gods be thank'd for this great day,
Which fills my heart again with manliness,
And banishes all idle thoughts from it.

Torsten—All hearts to-day do thank thee, gracious King,
For this true demonstration of thy love;
And ev'ry man who yet can bear a sword
Shall stand prepar'd for thee, at thy command.

(END OF THE FIRST SCENE.)

ACT I.

SCENE II.

(SCENE—*The sea-shore. Early dawn. A ship is near the shore, on which are a few men. Thora and Harald are on the shore.*)

Thora—O leave me, Harald, to my thoughts awhile,
Ere thou wouldst have me on yon ship embark.

Harald—There is no haste, O Queen, for thee this day,
And thou canst leave thy land in quietude.

Thora—O fairest land ! which I have lov'd so well,
And which has look'd upon such happy years
And shar'd with me the golden hours of joy,
I have one word to say to thee to-day
More cruel in its effects on thee and thine
Than all the words that ever thou hast heard,
For it shall pierce thee to thy very heart
And cause a blight to thrust its sting in thee.
Farewell !—sweet land—this is the unkind word
Which soon shall gather all the clouds of grief
And bring unto thy king much suffering.

O Helge ! thou canst not see thy darken'd sin
And canst not know the wrong that thou hast done,
In thus commanding me to banishment ;
For all thine actions seem to thee the right,
And thou hast rob'd them with thy vanity,
So that the blackness of their truest selves
Does not offend thine all too careless sight.
But unjust triumphs have a shorten'd life
And are more fearful than defeat itself :
For Truth's dark shadow e'er excels false light.
Alas ! dear Helge, this blindness cannot last,
And soon the gods must make thee see thyself
And recognise this error of thy heart.
O may they shew thee mercy on that day,
That less may be the sharpness of thy grief
And less tormenting all thy self-reproach.
Thy love has ceas'd for me, but O, dear Helge,
May no unkindness enter in thy heart
And turn thy love away from our dear son.
Let that remain unconquer'd by a foe,
And ever be a memory to thee

Of thy forsaken and ill-fated queen.
Think of my doom whene'er thou look'st on him,
Think of my sorrow in a far-off land ;
Remember that there lives a broken heart
Pierc'd by the sword of ever-torturing life,
And longing for the gentle sleep of death,
Whose dreams of sweetness know this world no more,
And by no human thought can be inspir'd.
Think thus, O Helge, and then thy harsher mind
Will never fight again against thy love,
And ne'er again o'er right gain victory.

Harald—I pray thee, lady—look not so distress'd ;
Give not an undue weight to sorrow's hand,
For there shall come a day when it is gone.
Time is an enemy to stubborn grief,
And breathes the spirit of forgetfulness
On all that unto suffering gives birth.

Thora—O tell me, Harald, does Rolf know that I
Am banishèd for ever from this land ?

Harald—The king commanded me to speak with him
And tell him of the purpose of his heart.
And ere, this morn, I came unto this ship
I rous'd him from the heavy sleep of youth,
And gave to him the sad intelligence.

(*Enter Rolf.*)

Rolf—O mother ! say—what means this news I hear ?
Is it then true that thou art banishèd ?

Thora —Alas ! my son, thy father hath so will'd,
And ere the sun shall rise upon this land,
I shall be sailing o'er the ocean deep
Towards the fair island known to me in youth.

Rolf—I understand this not, O mother mine.
There is no reason in such punishment ;
For no dark sin has ever stain'd thy life
Or driven gentle virtue from thy side.

Thora—The reason lies in that thy father's love
Has pass'd away from me and is no more.

Rolf—Then is it doubly cruel to banish thee—
For all the sin alone is in his heart,
And for his wrong he seeks to punish thee !

Thora—Judge not thy father !—O mine own dear son—
For thou, as yet, canst understand him not,
And valu'd judgments are not form'd by youth
Which is too hasty in its reasoning.
Thy father's love, alas ! has ceas'd for me,
And therefore does he cast me from his side ;
But he doth show a nobleness in this,
Because his courage hath made known the truth
Which cowardice so oft attempts to mask.
It is his honour that hath exil'd me,
For it were crime to hold a loving queen
Imprison'd and fast bound by chains of hate.

Rolf—Then also shall his son be banishèd !
I thank the gods to leave a loveless land,
Where honour's name is used in such a cause.
I will go with thee, mother, in this ship,
And spend my days for ever by thy side.

Thora—Alas !—my son—it were not well for thee—

Rolf—O mother !—is thy love for me dead too ?
The love a mother ever bears her son ?
Hast thou no wish to let me come with thee,
And live with thee at peace on yonder isle—
That I may share the burden of thy woe
And help to give thee back thy lost joy's crown ?
Can any doubt have fallen on thy mind
And turn'd thy heart away from Nature's course ?
Not so—mine own dear mother—thou shalt e'er
Retain the blessing of thy son's dear love,
And he shall ever rest before thine eyes
That this cruel blow may lose its sharpest sting.

Thora—Strengthen my heart, O Balder, with thy grace
And take my selfishness away from me.

O Rolf, my son, my heart is bound with grief
Because my love is now with me at war,
And longs to answer thee as thou couldst wish,
And say "No cruel force shall rend
The cord of Nature which doth bind us both,
And which must hold a mother to her son."
But love has higher aims than thoughts of self,
And ever wilt thou find a mother's will
Lies in all things which bring her children good,
Forgetful of herself and her desires.
And she will part from them—perhaps in tears—
And see them sail away for distant lands,
To spend long years of absence from her side—
Because her love is greater than herself,
And only longs for their prosperity.

My son, thou must remain in this, thy land,
For *here* must lie thy welfare—not with me
Upon an isle the world but little knows,
And where thy talents never could bear fruit.

Serve then thy country and thy father's will,
And thou shalt have the blessing of the gods
Who smile on all of Duty's followers.
Let no harsh thought of this most gloomy hour
Stand as a foe between thy king and thee ;
For if thou think that he hath done me wrong,
And feel towards him an ill-will in thy heart,
Teach it the pardon which is born of love,
And such forgiveness will ennoble thee,
And make of thee a worthier, truer man !

And now, my son, farewell, the hour has come
When I must leave this land I love so well ;
The reddening sky proclaims the coming sun
Which must not find me yet upon this shore,
To mock me with its radiance of joy ;
The glory of its light shall never fall
Upon the parting of a banish'd queen
With all that is most dear to her on earth.
Let darkness lend her cloak for such a scene
That even Nature's eyes see nought of it.

(She turns towards the ship.)

Now, Harald, am I ready to depart.
Farewell, dear Rolf, think well of all my words,
That they may rest within thy memory,
And ever be a guiding light to thee
When jealous darkness hides from thee the right.

I know not if I e'er shall see thee more—
But thoughts shall make our spirits join'd as one,
That each may feel the other's influence
And know that love stands near. Farewell !

(ROLF is too moved to speak. THORA turns to HARALD. ROLF falls upon his knees in prayer.)

(END OF THE SECOND SCENE.)

ACT I.

SCENE III.

SCENE—*The island to which Thora has been banished. There has been a violent storm, which is now subsiding. King Helge, Harald, Torsten and Rolf and the men come up from the shore, on which their boats have been thrown by the storm. Torsten, Rolf, and the men disperse in various directions. King Helge and Harald alone remain.*

(*A few years have elapsed since the period of Scene II.*)

King Helge—The gods be thank'd !—the storm is vanquishèd,
And we are now at peace upon this isle ;
But now the angry tempest is no more
And all its fears have pass'd away from us,
The sorrow of my mind returns again,
And whispers to my heart its words of grief.
O Harald !—sin hath shown me its deceit,
And I have learnt its cruel bitterness.
I drank its waters—they were sweet and clear,
And now their poison brings me suffering.

War was a passion stain'd with blackest crime,
For I made it a foe unto my love,
And bade it steal the goodness from my heart,
And place therein unyielding cruelty.
Rightly the gods have frown'd on such a deed
And sent my banish'd love to me again,
That it might torture me with its reproach,
And make me feel the loss of her, my queen,
Whom I despis'd and turn'd away from me
Because her virtue fought mine evil will.

He who is champion to an unjust cause
Gains victory disrob'd of happiness;
For joy from wrong takes ever speedy flight,
And sheweth grief where fitly it may reign.
Such an ignoble hero have I been,
And sorrow proves mine own unworthiness,
And sends repentance forth to plead with me,
Join'd hand in hand with mine uncherish'd love.
And now mine evil spirit is no more,
For these sweet influences master it,
And gently entering my cruel heart
They take the place where selfishness held sway.

O Harald ! if my Thora liveth yet,
My love can have no rest till she be found,
For now her griefs are likened to mine own,
And absence is our common enemy.
Alas ! why prize we not the gods' great gifts
And learn to make their blessings dear to us ?
Our constant treasures often touch us not,
And all their value in their loss is born,
And thus they leave behind them their reproach,
To smite our hearts for all our past neglect !

Harald (Springing up)—Rejoice, O King, for now I recognise
These scenes, and know this is the isle
Where thou didst find thy queen long years ago,
And where I left her, at thy stern command.

Helge—Thou speakest truly, Harald. O the gods
Have sent this storm, and cast me on these shores
That I might find my Thora once again,
And know once more the happiness of love.
Go, search the island, thou, and all my men,
And if success bring no reward to thee,
We will set sail, and seek out other lands,
And never rest until our prize be gain'd.

(Exit Harald.)

(The king kneels in prayer.)

(Enter Yrsa. She is, as it were, wandering through the forest heedlessly, singing as she goes the following lines :—

Though winter's cold hand
Sendeth snows to the land,
The birds ever merrily sing ;
And their voices of love
In sweet chorus, above,
Are to man, as the promise of spring.

(She suddenly catches sight of the kneeling figure of the king, and stops abruptly in her singing. The king rises and looks at Yrsa with astonishment.)

Helge.—O then the gods have hearken'd to my words !
Welcome, sweet Thora, for my love lives yet,
And is the greater for adversity.

(King Helge moves towards Yrsa with outstretched arms.)

Thy silv'ry notes I heard, and knew thy voice
Which added music to my fervent thoughts.

(*Yrsa starts back in alarm.*)

Yrsa—O sire,—what meanest thou?—I know thee not,
And ne'er before have look'd upon thy face.

Helge—Thou art not Thora!—yet how like thou art;
But thou art younger, and more beautiful,
And thou art sent me by the gods, sweet maid,
As if in answer to my heartfelt prayers.

O what perfection, and what loveliness;
If thou art not my queen, restor'd to youth,
Say who thou art, and how thou camest here.

Yrsa—My name is Yrsa, sire. I live alone,
And tend the goats on yonder mountain slopes—
And now I must return unto my home.

Helge—Not so, sweet maiden, hearken unto me;
Sit by my side upon this mossy bank,
And let my words e'er fall on patient ears.

I am a hero of a hundred fights,
And many times have led my men to war,
And ne'er have known the sorrows of defeat.
I am a king, whom all my people love,
And my desires are greater than their own.
O here is happiness and sweet content,
O here is joy that knows no rivalry;
Alas! Truth hath not bless'd these latter words,
For Grief hath bound me with its heavy chains,
Which I have tried to shatter, but in vain.

A woman's love makes pale all other joys,
And when we lose it, life is colourless,
And all the brightness of our pleasures fades,
Because we find that they have ow'd their birth
To that great secret of our inmost hearts,
Which gilds each hour, though we may know it not,
And gives a sweetness to our ev'ry thought !

The queen I lov'd I cast away from me,
Because I thought my love for her was gone,
But time hath prov'd my judgment to be false.
Unto this island did I banish her,
Where now a sudden storm hath driven me.
My men now search the isle—but O I feel
They cannot find the woman that they seek,
For since I parted with her, years have pass'd
And doubtless now she takes her rest with death.

(Enter Harald.)

Harald—O King—our search hath brought us no success,
For on this island is thy queen no more.

Helge—Go then, my Harald, back unto the ships,
And make them ready for our setting sail ;
Then thou and all my men, return to me.

(Exit Harald.)

O now I know, sweet maiden, thou art sent
To recompense me for my Thora's loss,
And that indeed the gods have will'd that thou
Shouldst come to me, in answer to my prayers.
Wilt thou, then, be King Helge's queen, that he
A life of peace and joy may know again ?

Yrsa—O King, I know thy name and know thy deeds,
For fame hath shouted them in ev'ry land.
Thou art indeed the hero of the North,
Unrivall'd and alone in bravery.
Courage stands nearest to a woman's love,
And is the strongest mover of her heart
Because it is but born in noblest men.
O Helge, I long have lov'd thee for thine acts
Which give thy name its high celebrity ;
And now I see thee and I hear thy voice,
The love I feel in me perfection is ;
And I will go with thee, and share thy throne,
And strive to be a worthy queen to thee.

But listen, Helge, for now must honour speak,
If e'er we find that Thora liveth yet,
In that same hour must I depart from thee,
And never look upon thy face again.
For though my heart might lose its very life,
Virtue is higher than humanity,
And by its pow'r our weaknesses are check'd
And brought to the nobility of strength.

Helge—My gentle Yrsa, these are purest thoughts,
And this, thy judgment, is indeed mine own.
If Thora lives thou canst not stay with me,
And she must then return to me, as queen.
But O I feel this day's events have shewn
That thou art truly sent me by the gods.
They rous'd the storm to throw me on this isle,
That I might search for Thora—and might know
That she no longer liv'd upon the earth.
They made me pray to them to ask their aid,
And while I pray'd, I heard thy sweetest voice,

And opening mine eyes, they fell on thee.

Such proof as this must break the human chains
Which hold belief imprison'd to the earth,
And give it wings to fly to higher things
Till with the gods it finds a resting place !

(Enter Harald, Torsten, Rolf, and K. Helge's men. Rolf stands apart from the others and looks dejected.)

Harald—The ships are ready that thou may'st depart.

Helge—O friends, the gods have frown'd not on thy king
In keeping Thora ever from his side.
For now behold the gift that comes from them.
This gentle maiden now shall be thy queen,
And happiness shall find its place again
In all my people's loving hearts and mine.
Come, worthy Harald, lead us to the ships,
For it were idle now to tarry here,
When all the honey of the isle is ours,
And goes with us upon our homeward voyage.

K. Helge, Yrsa, Harald, and Torsten walk, as it were, towards the shore. Rolf remains in thought.)

Rolf—The darkness in my heart makes all things black,
And crying for an understanding light.
O there is much in this imperfect world
Which goes beyond the bounds of human minds
And man's slight comprehension—
Yet seemingly immortal guidance has !
I pray that such a pow'r hath rul'd this day,
And that no accident hath shap'd its course—
For, O my gentle mother, if thou liv'st,

The cruelest blow hath fallen on thy heart,
And thou canst never raise thy face again
And look upon the world with happiness.
Thus would I fain have hope that thou art dead,
And yet—and yet—such hope I cannot have.
The earth in this hath lost its potency,
And all must look for guidance from above!

(ROLF *sadly turns to follow the others to the ships.*)

(END OF THE THIRD SCENE)

ACT I.

SCENE IV.

(SCENE—*The exterior of the palace of King Helge, which is on the right of the stage, and is approached by steps. The left and back of the stage is thickly covered with trees forming a forest. A moonlight, summer evening. Harald and Torsten discovered alone.*)

Harald—The happy issue of all war is peace,
And now that we have prov'd our courage lives,
And satisfied the longing of our hearts,
Our minds can turn themselves to revelry
Which now finds favour with our trusted king.

Torsten—Festivity can claim but careless hearts,
And those which have no wounds of grief unheal'd.
Thus are our thoughts prepar'd for gaiety,
For sorrow hath not yet demanded them.
But there is one who joins the feast to-day,

Whose face bears no reflection of our joy,
And as his heart is sad, he knows no mirth ;
For he will be no traitor to himself
By thrusting on his countenance the mask
Of smiling pleasure and of happiness.

Harald—Thus sheweth Rolf his worthy character,
Which will not stoop to fashion a disguise,
And clothe itself with falsehood and deceit.
Truth is man's strength—his surest sustenance—
And is a tree on which all virtues grow ;
But if they fall from it, their worth is gone,
And losing that which gave them life—they die.

Torsten—I would that Rolf could throw aside his grief
And lend the King his aid in merriment.

Harald—Though pomp and revelry and festivals
Come hand in hand together, still their pow'r
Can make no son forget his mother's love ;
And all their glitter cannot light the gloom,
Her loss has circl'd round his aching heart.
Nay, Torsten, Rolf will ne'er know happiness
Until he sees his mother's face again.

Torsten—Or know that she is dead and is no more,
And that the king hath right to Yrsa's hand ;
But here, uncertainty doth yet prevail,
And doubt gives ever to the mind unrest.

(During the last few lines they have walked up the steps of the palace, which they now enter, and are lost to view.)

(Enter from the Palace, K. Helge and Yrsa.)

Helge—Come, gentle Yrsa, sit on yonder seat,
And gain some comfort from the evening air;
These heated halls have set thy mind on fire,
And calmness does not influence thy words
Which thus proclaim strange judgments to mine ear.

(They seat themselves on a seat near the trees, and facing them.)

Yrsa—I thank thee, Helge, for all that thou hast done,
For all the splendour of this marriage feast,
And for the love this shews thou bearest me.
But strangely all these joys have pierc'd my heart
E'en as the sharpest sword of grief itself,
And in myself I feel a vague reproach
Which seems to taunt me with my wickedness.

Helge—Thy heart, sweet Yrsa, knows no wrongful act.
Tell me these thoughts that darkly clothe thy mind.

Yrsa—Thy courtiers, all, have had their smiles for me
And ev'ry face has had a kindly air,
Save one—and that has darkly look'd on me,
With coldness—and with glances of distrust.
O Helge! why is thy son so cruel
And what may mean these frowns of bitterness,
Which seem put forth to hide some inward hate,
And hold it lest it burst from its control!

Helge—There is no hate within my dear son's heart,
But sorrow long hath quietly dwelt therein;
And all his thoughts are on his mother's loss,
Though he believeth that she liveth yet.
Thus are our festive scenes to him as nought,
And he can be no sharer of our joy.

Yrsa—O Helge! alas! I too can share it not.
Hear now the earnest cry of my poor heart!
I can but feel that Thora is not dead,
And that her living will destroy all hope
Of my remaining long thy loving queen.
She will come back to thee with all her love,
And then with coldness thou must bid me go,
And end my days with but a broken heart
On which love's sunshine casts no hopeful ray.
O Helge! thou canst not understand these fears,
Which haunt me in my dreams when sleep's light touch
Should lay all tortures of the mind to rest.

Dreams are the kingdom of some ghostly pow'r,
Whose phantoms oft are sent to prophesy
The shadows which shall fall about our lives,
And bring us to the depths of misery.
And these my fearful dreams can but predict
The terrors of my life's catastrophe!

Helge—Now let sweet peace reign o'er thy troubl'd mind
That it may banish these disturbing fears,
Which, as thou say'st, are phantoms of thy dreams,
And have no place in life's reality.
Hearken, my Yrsa, and my words shall give
The spirit of tranquility to thee.
Though Thora live, and she return to me,
I will not re-instate her as my queen,
And if she plead with me, her words shall fall
On ears made deaf by all my love for thee!
And ne'er again my halls shall shelter her,
For now my life to thee alone is giv'n,
And no authority shall arm itself
To fight and overthrow our happiness.

Yrsa—Cease, Helge ! for these thy words are cruel,
And vindicate man's basest quality
As something virtuous and beautiful.
If I have proof that Thora liveth yet
Though thou mayest foully turn her from thy side,
It were the darkest sin to stay with thee,
And it were wicked to be call'd thy queen,
When she, who holds the title, given by thee,
Lives, as an outcast from thine unblest home.
Nay, Helge, these things shall never pass,
And we will seek no joys the gods shall curse.

Helge—So be it, Yrsa ; but destroy these thoughts
Which bear thy fears that Thora yet doth live,
For they are born of thine inflamèd mind,
Whose judgment is not formed by evidence
But by the dreams of airy phantasy !
Did I not seek for Thora patiently ?
Did I not pray that she might come to me ?
Thus have I done !—and O my dearest wife,
Thou know'st the answer that the gods have giv'n,
Which seem'd so strong a proof of Thora's death.
Be therefore guided by immortal pow'rs,
And as they give thee joy, accept of it ;
And let not thine imaginative dreams
Present a living Thora to thy mind—
But if thou needs must dream, then dream the truth,
And let thy fancies paint thee Thora—dead !

(A rustle is heard amongst the trees immediately in front of King Helge and Yrsa. They are both seized with the utmost alarm. The boughs are parted by a white hand, and Thora stands before them, as pale as death. She is

robed in black from head to foot, which greatly contrasts the nuptial garments of Yrsa and the king. At the commencement of the following lines spoken by Thora, Yrsa falls fainting upon the seat, and the king for the moment is stricken with terror.)

Thora—Behold thy Thora ! and behold !—she lives !

O is not truth unkind to thee and thine,
When thou dost ask of it to make me dead !
Alas ! for these imaginative dreams
Which thou hast hated, for they gave me life,
And all the burning wishes of thy heart
Have long'd that death might clasp me to its breast,
That thine iniquity might prosper thee !
But, Helge, the lesson that thou learn'st to-day
Is that no joy is the reward of sin—
And that crime follows on its author's steps,
And stabs the heart of him that gave it life,
That he may recognise its loathsome birth
And know of the ingratitude of wrong,
Which ever seeks its maker's overthrow.
Alas ! thy sins have now encircl'd thee,
And they will bring destruction to thy joy
Which thou shalt never know in life again.
This gentle maiden when her mind returns
Will fly from thee, as honour flies from wrong,
And misery shall enter in thy heart.
Farewell, O Helge, for death prepare thyself,
For there alone shall peace come back to thee.

(She disappears amongst the trees.)

(King Helge bends over Yrsa.)

Helge—The dreaded evil spirit now is gone,
And all thy fear can follow in its track.

Yrsa—O Helge ! alas for this unhappy day
Which clothes mine awe-struck dreams with dark
rob'd truth,
And brings presentiment to meet with it.
This is the death seal to our happiness ;
And now my right to stay with thee is gone !
And never must I see thee more—farewell.

(She moves sadly from King Helge's side).

Helge—Not so, sweet Yrsa, I have won thy love,
And thou shalt never more depart from me.

(He moves towards her quickly).

Yrsa—Stand back, O Helge ! and soil not virtue's robe !
O may the gods remember me this day,
And give me strength to bear mine hour of trial
And lead me ever on mine honour's path.

(She passes into the forest and disappears.)

(END OF THE FIRST ACT.)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

SCENE—*The Court of King Helge. King Helge discovered alone.*)

Helge—Opulence, luxury, and palaces—
Kingdoms and thrones—courtiers and warriors—
Are but as barren earth which grows no flow'r,
Are as a lightless world, a sunless sky,
If love is absent, and it knows them not.
My wealth, my riches, crumble into dust,
My palace falls before my restless eyes,
And now becomes a heap of broken stones;
My kingdom is a dungeon strongly barr'd,
My throne a pow'r which triumphs over me
And keeps me bound in torture to its seat,
Because my Yrsa knows me now no more,
And by her flight, hath curs'd my crown with woe !

Love is the beating heart of human life,
And is a single ray of perfect joy ;
Love is a world ideal of all mankind,
Where ev'ry fancy finds a happy place ;
Love is a kingdom rul'd by poetry,
And all are poets who do dwell therein ;
And Love is Evil's strongest enemy,
And sheds some light upon the darkest mind !

O now the treasure of my heart is gone,
The beauties of the world are lost to me ;
And life is as a ship, cast on a rock,
And torn to pieces by a raging sea !

(*Enter Harald*).

O welcome Harald ! hast thou seen my queen,
My Yrsa ?

Harald—Aye, O King, and I have pray'd of her
To grant thy will, and come again to thee ;
But all my words were wasted eloquence,
And their persuasiveness has brought me nought.

Helge—Alas ! I fear'd it so ! O now my grief
Will stay with me, till life joins hands with death.

(*Enter Torsten*).

Torsten—O King ! there is a grave report about,
And I am fearful there is truth in it.
The queen, to save herself from thy pursuit,
Hath listen'd to King Adils' words of love,
And she this day becomes his wife and queen.

Helge—O Torsten ! can such words be true, indeed !
O here calamity o'ertakes my grief,
And stands prepar'd to fight with hope itself,
And cruelly stab it to the very heart.
Adils, alas ! is not a virtuous king,
And if this rumour is the voice of truth,
The days of Yrsa's happiness are gone,
And all her life by darkness shall be crown'd,
For Adils' crimes must change each day to night,
Each hour of sunshine to the deepest gloom.

Torsten—We will go forth, O King, and fight for thee,
And teach King Adils and his men defeat.
Then will we bring thy queen to thee again,

That all thy days be bless'd by peace and love
Whose union wakes in man his highest joy.
Our swords have often brought thee happiness,
And they are ever ready, at thy will,
To slay thine enemies and right thy wrongs.


Helge—I thank thee, Torsten, for thy noble words,
Which true and manly courage hath inspir'd.
But it were wrong in me to bid thee fight
Against so strong and powerful a foe ;
For death would claim thee and my gallant men,
And thy reward could be but thy defeat.
But there are other pow'rs than those of arms,
Which do not owe their force to skilful swords,
And subtleness creates their potency.
King Adils is an avaricious man,
And I will go with treasures to his court,
Which I will give to him if he restore
My Yrsa, and my queen, to me again.
His is a heart e'er fill'd with worldly greed,
Which ne'er has known love's noble influence
To break the bounds enclos'd by selfishness.
O may the gods their blessing give to me,
To prove that avarice and base desire
Can never triumph over virtuous love !

(END OF SCENE I.)

ACT II.

SCENE II.

(SCENE—*The Court of King Adils. King Adils and King Helge discovered.*)



Adils—And now, dear Helge, the words of welcome o'er,
Say why good fortune is my friend to-day,
And brings thee to my side.

Helge— O Adils !—mock me not !
Thou knowest well what brings me here to-day,
Thou knowest that my Yrsa is thy queen.

Adils—*Thy* Yrsa !—O not so, my gracious Helge,
Yrsa is mine, mine own true loving wife.

Helge—Does she then love thee? O when Yrsa's eyes
Look'd into mine, I thought eternal truth
Inspir'd their steadfast gaze of trustfulness ;
And when her voice declar'd her purest love,
I thought that nought on earth could turn its course.

Adils—Let not thy mind, brave Helge, be thus distress'd,
The most courageous man can know defeat ;
And ev'ry lover cannot gain the prize
His heart hath made so perfect in his sight.
Now, in this matter, which concerns thy love,
Must thou acknowledge victory is mine ;
And that the fairest maiden of the North
Hath willingly resign'd herself to me,
Because she listen'd to her heart's desire.
Woman hath ever reason in her choice,
And thou, dear Helge, hast greyer locks than I,
And Age hath nearly claim'd thee for its own,
While Youth is proud to keep me by its side !
Expect not, then, O friend, what is not meet ;
Thou art defeated in this race of love—
But he who gains the prize deserves it well,
And great indeed shall be his conqueror.

Helge—But one thing answer me, as man to man ;
Dost thou, O Adils, love her from thy heart ?

Adils—Love is for feebler natures than mine own,
And hath no place within a champion's breast.
I love my Yrsa not ; but I am proud
That such a beauteous queen doth grace my court,
And I am satisfied her loveliness
Awakens envy in less happy men.

Helge—And does her worth then fill so high a place,
That nought upon the earth can equal it ?
And if some treasure were but offer'd thee
If thou, for it, wouldst sacrifice thy queen,
Wouldst thou not do so, Adils ?—answer me !

Adils—Man's nature ever longs for greater things,
And to obtain them will he e'er renounce
All that finds lesser value in his sight.
Yea, Helge, I would indeed disown my queen,
To gain a treasure I could more esteem.

(While thus speaking his eyes have fastened themselves on a casket King Helge is holding. King Helge now opens it, and shews its contents to King Adils.)

Helge—Then know, O friend, what brings me here to-day ;
These precious jewels are thine if thou restore
My loving queen unto my lonely hearth.

Adils—What treasures, noble Helge, thou shewest me !
O ne'er before mine eyes have seen such worth ;
If thou, indeed, wilt give these jewels to me,
Yrsa is thine again this very day.

Helge—O then my prayers have reach'd the goal they sought ;
And now my mind will know its woe no more.

Adils—Rejoice, O Helge, for now immediately
Shall Yrsa stand before thee once again.
And when she hears the voice that once she knew,
In harmony with thy most noble love,
Thine eloquence must gain the victory,
And gladly will she then return with thee.

*(He opens a door leading on to a balcony outside the palace,
where Yrsa is seated. He brings Yrsa before K. Helge,
and retires into an adjoining chamber.)*

Yrsa—What means this Helge?—what brings thee to this place?
Dost thou not know the chain that bound our lives
And join'd them both in happiness and love
Is broken, and can ne'er be whole again ?
Our virtues we have cast upon the ground,
But now, thou wouldst make doubly black our sin,
By seeking me, when thou shouldst shun my face ;
Fly then, O Helge, and never see me more !

Helge—Hear me, dear Yrsa, ere thou bidst me go,
And let thy gentle heart subdue thy mind,
Which forms so harsh a judgment on our deed.
Is thy love dead that thou canst use such words
To him who has declar'd his love for thee ?
O Yrsa, when I had thee by my side,
Life was a garden fill'd with fairest flow'rs,
Whose fragrance, wafted by the summer wind,
Was as the breath of perfect love itself.
Now thou hast left me, dreary days are mine,
And all these joyous flow'rs of life are dead !

Yrsa—He who doth bow himself to meet with sin
Prostrates his mind to every misery,
And thou canst never hope for joy again,
Until thou hast repented of thy wrong.

Helge—Are all thy words indeed inspir'd by Truth?
If so, I understand such virtue not.
Since that dread night when Thora came to us,
E'en as an apparition from the dead,
She never has again return'd to me.
Why shouldst thou not, sweet Yrsa, then be mine?
For Thora is no longer now my queen,
And doubtless I shall never see her more.
O look not on me with such heartless frowns,
As if thou wouldst repel mine argument,
And drive my very thoughts away from me.
Thou art not happy here, I know full well,
For Virtue never seeks Iniquity
To guide it in its search for perfect joy.
King Adils' acts must make thee hate his name,
And love for him thou wilt not, canst not bear;
And thou hast made thyself unwillingly
The govern'd slave of wickedness and woe.
O cast away, my Yrsa, such despair,
And come to me and be my queen again,
That both our lives may run as rivers join'd
Until they reach the open sea, of death.
For though thou frownest on me, yet I know
These frowns are shewn me to conceal thy love
Which ever strongly burns within thy heart.
O Yrsa! make no more a foe of joy,
And now reject thy self-sought, useless grief,
Whose shadow, also, as thou knowest well,

Falls o'er my sunlit path of happiness
And brings me, with thyself, to sorrowing.
Thou art my remedy, and I am thine ;
Divided—wretchedness will e'er be ours,
United—woe will fade as night to day.

Yrsa—Alas ! O Helge ! thou canst not reason thus,
For all thine arguments are bow'd to earth
And bear no spirit of thy higher self.
Could happiness indeed be ever ours,
When night and day, like an unceasing fire
The knowledge of our sin burnt fearfully ?
Joy is no mask that we can wear at will,
It finds its life within the human heart,
When purity therein reigns absolute ;
And minds that nurse a consciousness of wrong
Are the most pow'rful foes of happiness.
While Thora lives, she is thy queen alone
And I must never listen to thy voice
To hear its words of tenderness and love.
Return then, Helge ; go back unto thy court
With honour yet unstain'd with deeper sin.

Helge—O never, Yrsa !—till thou com'st with me !
O'er ev'ry opposition to our love
Save thine—I now have gained the victory.
Thora has left me ne'er to see me more—
Adils consents that thou shouldst be my queen,
And if mine arguments will move thee not
From here shalt thou by force be borne away !
Come then, sweet Yrsa, to thy Helge again !

(He attempts to seize her, but Yrsa, evading him, rushes out on to the balcony).

Yrsa—Soil not my robes with sin's despised hand !
Harm not mine ears with words of wickedness !
Fly from my presence, Helge, and ne'er return,
For if thou comest nearer to my side
In the attempt to use thy cowardly force,
I hurl myself upon the stones beneath,
Whose mercy shall deliver me to death.

(Re-enter Adils.)

Helge—False was my judgment, Adils, when I thought
That Yrsa would come back to me again ;
Her virtue is more potent than her love,
Which now for ever hath she vanquished.
Yrsa, mine eyes shall ne'er again seek thine
To bear my message of undying love ;
My voice shall never more be heard by thee
To waken sorrow in thy noble heart.
I thank the gods that thou hast cross'd my path,
To make me see how low my virtue lay,
When to thine own most high ideal compar'd.
Those links of sympathy which held our lives
United in the influence of love
Are rent asunder for eternity.
My words are ended. O may strength be ours
To soothe the anguish of this last farewell !

*(He makes a sign of farewell to Adils, and passes out quickly.
Yrsa moves out of sight on the balcony.)*

Adils—So Yrsa still is mine—and thine the jewels !
But here, O Helge, deceit befriendeth thee,
If thou canst think I ne'er shall gain thy wealth.
I will o'ertake thee on thy journey home,

And I will leave thee to the care of death,
That thou mayst know how base a thing it is
To tempt good men with treasures that are thine,
And which thou knowest well they cannot have.
Thine honour, love, and nobleness combin'd
Shall be thy warriors and fight for thee ;
But I will put my trust but in my sword
To bring eternal silence to thy words,
Which are alone inspir'd by vanity !

(END OF SCENE II.)

ACT II.

SCENE III.

(SCENE—*A rude hut; interior. King Helge lies mortally wounded. Harald and Torsten are standing by watching the unconscious king. Thora kneels by his side, bathing his wound.*)

Harald—He turns his head—his eyes are opening—
Methinks his mind returns to him again.

(*The king opens his eyes and looks round wonderingly.*)

Helge—O Harald !—say—what brings me to this place ?
Why lie I here in torture and in pain ?
My brain is burning like some raging fire
Whose flames destroy my thoughts and memory,
And all the past has vanish'd from my mind.
Speak Harald—for thy looks are grave and sad,
And I must fear that some calamity
Hath nearly brought me to a cruel death.

Harald—Alas ! O King—the truth is soon declar'd.
As we were passing through a darken'd wood,
Upon our homeward road from Adils' court
He fell on us with many armèd men,
And Adils' cowardly sword hath pierc'd thy breast.

Helge—What purpose had he, Harald, in this deed ?

Harald—To gain thy treasure—this was his desire ;
And he, O King, hath stolen it from thee.

Helge—And thou hast brought me wounded to this hut ?

Harald—We fear'd thee dead, but finding life yet thine,
We brought thee to this shelter on our road.

Helge—Who tends my wound ?

Thora—Thou knowest, Helge, her name.

Helge—I know thy voice ; familiar is thy face.
O memory return to me again !
I seem to be within some darkest cave,
With daylight seen but dimly far away,
And as I look upon thy countenance
The sunlight of some past steals over me—
But like the streak of day within my cell,
Its influence is distant from my sight,
And there are moments when but darkness reigns.

Thora—O Helge ! look up into mine eyes again !
Dost thou not know me in thine hour of trial ?
Dost thou not know thy Thora and thy queen,
Whom thou hast honor'd once with purest love ?

Helge—O now I pass into the light of day,
And now my memory is whole again !

Thou art indeed my gentle, noble queen,
And I thy wretched and thy sinful lord.
O Thora !—and is this thy dwelling-place ?
Is this the outcome of my cruel crime ?

Thora—This hut, dear Helge, hath lately harbour'd me,
That I might know that I was near to thee.

Helge—This is the punishment for all my sins ;
A greater pow'r than that of mortal man
Hath brought me bleeding to this couch of woe,
Where I must now prepare to meet with death.
O had I but repented of my wrong
And brought thee, Thora, to my side again,
The burden of this hour had not been mine.
Unsorrow'd sin is like an ambush'd foe
Who waits with patience for the harden'd heart
That it may thrust in it the sword of death ;
And nothing can destroy that enemy
And drive it from its secret hiding place,
But that true courage, born of penitence.
And thus the victory is with my sin,
For now it brings me to the close of life ;
But, O my Thora, ere death comes to me,
Say that there is forgiveness in thy heart,
For all the wrong that I have done to thee.

Thora—It was my weakness that call'd forth thy deed,
And had I never spoken of my fears
To teach thy manliness contempt for me,
Thou hadst not banish'd me in bitterness.
We both have sinn'd, and both are punishèd ;
But I, O Helge, have suffer'd more than thou,
By all the knowledge of thy wrongful love

Which brought but misery and grief to thee ;
And it is but for this the gods demand
Thy sacrifice of life and earthly joy.

Helge—Wisdom and justice rule thy gentle words
And truth hath added to their worthiness.
My punishment hath cleans'd me of my sin,
And thy sweet countenance destroyed the love
Which sprang from baseness and iniquity.
O Thora ! in this world of earthly life,
Our love can never know its joys again,
But if the gods take pity on our fate,
I yet may greet thee in Valhalla's halls !

Thora—Life's griefs and sorrows are the sacrifice
That immorality demands of man ;
And all the difficulties of the world,
And all the trials that we must overcome,
Do but prepare our minds to gain that crown
Bless'd by the glory of eternity.
In death, O Helge, our joy shall know that life
Which is beyond the influence of Time,
And it shall ne'er be marr'd by suffering.

Helge (in an exhausted voice)—The air seems filled with
wondrous melody,
Such as mine ears before have never heard ;
And I could fancy that a thousand harps
Their music join'd in noble harmonies.
Is it not morning ?—do the birds not sing ?
For night and darkness now I see no more,
And all around me there is purest light,
Whose splendour far excels the summer sun.
O Thora, all mine agony has gone,

And there will be no death for me this day—
But I am weary, and will rest awhile,
And seek the influence of gentle sleep ;
And all my dreams shall see thee by my side,
And all my thoughts shall govern'd be by peace.

(Enter Rolf hastily. He stops abruptly on seeing the king lying as it were asleep.)

Rolf—Then the report which reach'd mine ears spoke truth,
Speak to me mother ! Tell me all thou know'st,
And all there is to know concerning this.

Thora—Speak in a gentler tone, my son, for now
Thy father's eyes are clos'd in soothing sleep.
I pray thee, Harald—tell him—tell him all !

(Rolf and Harald move away from the vicinity of the King and Thora.)

Harald—The king, O Rolf, lies wounded unto death.
King Adils' cowardly sword hath pierc'd his heart,
To gain his treasures that he coveted.
Thy father, Torsten, and myself,—alone—
Were passing through the woods from Adils' court,
When, ere we knew what fearful thing had chanc'd,
King Adils, and some hundred warriors,
Rush'd from the darkness and surrounded us.
Torsten and I were bound by unseen hands ;
And Adils, laughing in thy father's face,
And crying in a taunting, cruel voice :
“ Thy jewels and Yrsa now shall *both* be mine ! ”
Plung'd his mean sword with force into his breast,
So that he fell with groans upon the ground.

Then noble Adils searched and found the jewels,
And rode with all his followers away.

We loos'd the cords that bound us, speedily,
And brought our wounded king unto this hut ;
But death alone can end his suffering,
And free him from this fearful agony
Which great King Adils' sword so well hath wrought.

Rolf—O Harald ! can a man have stoop'd to this ?
A warrior, a courtier, and a king ?
O never has the face of villainy
Seem'd half so cunning and so treacherous !
He who can bend to deeds of cowardice
And gain his ends by falsest bravery,
Is traitor to his name and to the world,
Which ever by some great and natural law,
Cleanses itself from all that is *too* vile,
Too foul and loathsome for humanity.
This laughing Adils soon shall learn my smile,
While groaning in the tortures of his death ;
And thus my father shall be well aveng'd
For all that he hath suffer'd by this crime.

(He moves towards King Helge.)

Be happy, O my father, for thy son
Shall never rest till Adils breathes no more.

Thora—Thy father heareth not thy words. O Rolf !
Now art thou all the world has left for me ;
Kneel by my side, and bow thy head in pray'r,
That strength be given us to bear our grief.
O it is harder yet to live

And struggle with the sorrows of our hearts
Than to be stricken by the hand of death,
Whose touch, though cruel, is man's deliverer,
And is his only guide to perfect peace.

(END OF SCENE III).

ACT II.

SCENE I V.

(SCENE—*The Court of King Adils. A banquet is taking place.
At the head of the table sits King Adils ; at his right hand,
Yrsa*

*In the doorway stands Rolf disguised as an old man ; he is
leaning upon a staff and is clothed in a bearskin.*

He is not noticed by King Adils and his courtiers.)

Adils—Now, fairest Yrsa, let thy gloomy looks
Be lost in smiles and perfect happiness ;
The greatest joy the earth could give to me
By mine own skill and prowess have I gain'd,
And all, sweet Yrsa, hath been done for thee
To prove the true devotion of my love !
That evil-doer, Helge, is now no more,
And ne'er again can torture thee with words,
Which thou, who lovest virtue, shouldst not hear ;
And I have won his costly jewels for thee
That all thy heart's desire be gratified,
And that the spirit of cupidity
Should gain no hold upon thy gentle mind,
And o'er thy heart, obtain a mastery.

And thus to-day to celebrate our joy
And thankfulness for our prosperity,
This feast is given to my worthy men,
Who did so skilfully assist their king
To rid the land of that mean-hearted wretch,
Whose heart was black with villainous intent,
To stain our queen's fair name with wickedness,
And tear her from her throne of chastity !

Rejoice, then, friends—his schemes have not
prevail'd ;

And we have triumph'd o'er so base a foe,
As true nobility e'er gains the day
When it takes arms against depravity.
Drink to the honour of your worthy king,
And to thy queen's deliverance from wrong.
Drink to her virtue and that noblest pow'r,
Which fights temptation till it conquers it,
And lets no thought of self assist its cause.
Drink—and let all your thoughts and acts
Be of the standard of your gentle queens',
Whose heart is sanctified by purity.

(The men give a loud shout of approbation, and drink.)

Adils(aside)—Fair spoken words—well thought of—well devis'd !

And they have ably mov'd these empty minds
Who think my heart in sympathy with them.
Virtue and honour !—noble words indeed !
For when I shout them to my men, they stand
Ready to fight and battle at my will.
Virtue and honour ! O good memory
Forget all else, but e'er these words retain,
For now thou seest they have pow'r o'er men,

And can bring friends to do the work of slaves.
(*He catches sight of Rolf standing in the doorway*)
A stranger at the threshold now there stands.
Come to me, friend, and say what brings thee here.

(*Rolf comes before King Adils*)

Rolf—Fierce winds, O King, have fought against my ship
Until at last they wreck'd me on thy shores,
Friendless and helpless in an unknown land ;
But when I heard King Adils o'er it rul'd,
I straightway turn'd my steps unto his court,
There to seek shelter, for he is renown'd
For kindness and hospitality
To ev'ry stranger who comes unto him,
Craving relief and succour from distress.

Adils—Well spoken, friend—I pray thee, seat thyself
And drink our wine with us this merry day ;
Thou art right welcome to this joyous feast
Which is to celebrate a victory,
More priz'd and valu'd in my heart than all
The riches that my kingdom giveth me ;
For my success hath been o'er sin itself,
And I have lent assistance to the gods
In bringing unto death a wicked man
Whose crimes were made yet darker by his rank,
For he whom I did slay was Denmark's king.

Rolf—I drink, O King, to ev'ry sentiment,
Which seeks to praise the honour of mankind,
And to destroy the heart where evil lurks,
Too cowardly to show its hateful face
Unto the world to gain its deep disgust.

With such a feeling can I join thy feast,
To celebrate a victory o'er crime
And man's detestable depravity.

Adils—Thy voice and speech are witnesses for thee,
And tell me that thou art disguisèd, friend.
Say who thou art, and why thou comest here !
For there is hatred in thy tone, methinks,
And I could think thou art an enemy
And not the friend that I have callèd thee.

(Rolf throws off the bearskin and his disguise.)

Rolf—I am the son of him whom thou hast slain
To gain his treasures for thy greedy self.
Rolf is my name, and I am here this day
To claim the jewels that theft has given thee ;
And to advise thee, if thou keepest them,
Thy road which leads to death will be but short.
Therefore, give back to me thy stolen gain,
That I may not be guilty of the crime
Which hath so lower'd and debas'd thy name.

Adils—Thou art a brave and nobly spoken youth ;
I like thee for thy frank, courageous words,
Which show the manly spirit of thy heart.
This day will I return the jewels to thee,
Because thou hast so ably ask'd for them.
But stand thus not apart, my noble Rolf,
Be seated once again, and at my side.

(Rolf re-seats himself.)

Adils—Fill our guest's goblet with the wine I love,
That he be duly honour'd at my court.

(Rolf's goblet is filled with different wine to what the king and his guests are drinking. It has, however, the same appearance, but Rolf looks at it suspiciously, and does not drink it.)

Adils—Now drink, good Rolf, unto my fairest queen
More priz'd than all the women of the North,
For none with such perfection can compare.
Canst thou then wonder at thy father's love
And strong desire to take her for himself?
I took some pity on his burning heart,
And would, indeed, have made the sacrifice
Of all mine own affection for his sake;
But virtue rul'd the pure heart of my queen,
And she but frown'd upon his sinful words,
So that he left my court as in disgrace
And conscience-stricken by his infamy!

Drink then, O Rolf, in honour of my queen,
And as a tribute to her chastity.

(During this speech when the king's eyes have been turned towards the queen, Rolf has succeeded in changing his goblet with King Adils'.)

Rolf (in a loud voice)—I drink to her who weareth Virtue's crown
And may the gods give blessing to the draught!

(All drink. King Adils' goblet falls from his hand.)

Adils—O what mistake, or treachery is this!
There is a faintness coming over me,
And I could fancy it were death itself.

(King Adils falls to the ground.)

Rolf—Thou hadst prepar'd for me this fatal draught,
And I have chang'd my goblet with thine own
That thou shouldst suffer for thy wretched deed,
And learn how truly fearful is the cost
Of vile deception and of perfidy.
Thy death, O King, thou dost deserve full well,
And I can smile upon thy wicked face,
As thou hast laugh'd on men of nobler mien
When struggling in the agony of death !
O now, my father, justice has been done,
And thy revenge is thus accomplishèd.

(Rolf is seized by King Adils' men.)

Adils (in a faint voice)—Touch not my guest, and lay no
hands on him.

O noble Rolf ! O now do I repent,
And beg of thee forgiveness for my sins,
Which I have foully and so cruelly wrought
Against thy father and his worthy son.
O kneel, good Rolf, in friendship at my side,
And let me hear thy blessing from thy lips,
That I may leave this evil world in peace.

*(Rolf kneels down by the side of the king, who immediately
draws a dagger from his girdle, and with a supreme effort
stabs Rolf to the heart. He falls dead upon the ground.)*

Adils—O now death comes with smiles upon his face,
And I can die indeed in happiness,
For I have triumph'd o'er mine enemy
Who dies defeated and in misery.

(King Adils falls back exhausted and dies.)

Yrsa has risen with the remainder of the guests from the table. She seems stupefied, and moves aimlessly towards the threshold, where she is confronted with a figure robed in black—Thora. She starts back alarmed.)

Yrsa—O say, what cruel ill-fortune brings thee here ;
Is it not Thora who before me stands?—
King Helge's queen ?

Thora—Yea, Yrsa, I am she ;
And I am come with haste unto this place,
Borne on the wings of ever flying fear,
Because I dreaded evil to my son,
Who went alone to meet his enemy.
O say, where is my Rolf? mine own dear son !

Yrsa (*in a quiet voice*)—Be strong, O mother's heart, to bear
this blow ;
Thy son lies yonder in the sleep of death
Slain by the king, who lies there sleeping too
In that same sleep of solemn mystery.

(Thora walks with hesitating steps to the spot as if stunned, and falls with a cry upon the body of Rolf. Yrsa is close at hand, and raises her.)

Yrsa—O let thy son's brave spirit dwell in thee,
And it shall strengthen thee against thy grief,
For Courage is the vanquisher of woe.
The human passions of an angry world,
And ev'ry sorrow of this little life,
Have pass'd away from him for ever now
And all he knoweth is felicity.
Grieve not for him, because his earthly form

Hath now his work of life accomplishèd ;
Grieve not for him, because thou think'st him dead,
For he is born into a newer life,
Beyond the mind of poor humanity
And man's imprisonèd intelligence,
Which hidden boundaries for ever meets ;
Grieve not for him—because his mind hath pass'd
The limits which surround this mortal world
For nothing now holds fast his intellect
And it rejoices in infinity ;
O Thora ! be not selfish in thy grief !—
For all thy tears are for thyself alone
And for thine own affliction—not for him
Who liveth in a world of life and light
Made perfect by its immortality.

Thora—O Rolf ! my son ! thou wert too young to die,
For thou wert in the morning of thy life
With all the brightness of its day to come ;
And thou wert not preparèd for death's night,
Which giveth rest to those who well have toil'd,
And have endur'd the burden of life's day ;
Thine was the spring of life—when all the world
Is fill'd by Nature with the breath of youth,
And when each heart doth know a new-born hope.
And now comes winter with its chill death-wind,
Ill-tim'd, unwelcome, and in cruelty.
Is it for this, O my belovèd son,
That I have been the guardian of thy life,
Have watch'd o'er all thine actions and thy deeds,
Have moulded thee to face the stormy world
And fight its battles with a manly heart ?
Is it for this that I have fashion'd thee

To run life's race with sure and speedy feet,
That thou couldst gain its prize of victory?
Where was the value of my mother-love?
Where was the worth of tender, constant care?
If all its fruit was to be idly thrown
Into the useless, barren pit of death,
Which giveth nothing back unto the world
For all its fearful sacrifice of life!
O this is cruelty indeed beyond
The pow'r's of my poor human intellect—
For care and love have met with no reward
And are repuls'd, by base ingratitude
As if they were the meanest qualities!

Alas! O dreary Life—thy joys are gone,
And all I lov'd in thee is now no more;
A world of sorrow hast thou given me,
And thou art powerless to heal my grief.
But death, though e'er a foe to happiness
Yet vanquishes the heart's great agony,
And soothes our anguish by its gentle touch
And by its spirit of oblivion;
Then death shall greet me this unhappy day
That with mine own dear son I, too, may sleep
Until the daybreak of Eternity.

*(Thora stretches out her hand to take the dagger lying near
Rolf, but her strength fails her, and she falls back fainting
in Yrsa's arms.)*

Yrsa—Not so!—it were thy virtue's own defeat
To force death's hand to seize thee in its grasp;
Thy nobleness shall gain its earthly crown
By striving with the sorrows of thy life,

Until the gods shall end thy days in sleep
And that oblivion thy mind desires.
O Thora !—it were weak to ask to die,
When our affliction seems too great to bear ;
For then life shews its true nobility
And lofty courage—by its suffering.

Thus gentle Thora shalt thou learn to live,
And by the tribulation of thy heart
Gather the seeds of life's philosophy.

*(Yrsa looks at Thora and notices a great change in her face.
She places her hand on her heart. It has ceased to beat—
Thora is dead.*

Yrsa—O then the gods have heard thine earnest pray'r,
And thou hast drifted down the stream of life
Unto the ocean governèd by death
Where all is shrouded in obscurity.
But there, at least, thy heart shall find its rest,
For o'er death's sea—as though it rul'd its waves—
Hovers the form of ever gentle Peace.

ASLOG

ASLOG

| | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|
| KING HEIMER, | . | . | |
| „ RAGNOR, | . | . | |
| „ BELE, | . | . | |
| AGNAR, | } | . | . |
| ERIC, | | | |
| | | . | <i>Sons of Ragnor.</i> |
| AKE, | . | . | . |
| | . | . | <i>A poor man living in the Forest.</i> |
| GRIMA, | . | . | . |
| | . | . | <i>His wife.</i> |
| INGEBORG, | . | . | . |
| | . | . | <i>Daughter of Bele.</i> |
| ASLOG, | . | . | . |

ASLOG.

PROLOGUE.

SCENE—*A forest ; winter.*

(*King Heimer is passing through the forest. He carries a harp in which Aslog lies secreted.*)

K. Heimer—There is an unkind feeling in the wind
Whose breath is chill. Black are the wintry skies,
And ev'ry cloud has lost its summer smile ;
But here, amidst these trees and forest glades
Alone with nature and remov'd from all
The ugly, erring passions of mankind,
The quietude and stillness woo repose
And freedom's hand is join'd in that of peace !

Here, then, I lend myself to rest awhile,
And place my harp upon the frozen ground ;
My harp ! now highly priz'd, and dearly lov'd,
And cherish'd above all the things on earth,
For safely have I hidden in its breast
The darling treasure of my aged heart.

(He opens a door at the foot of the harp and takes little Aslog out of it.)

My sweetest Aslog !—open now thine eyes,
And let them gaze awhile into mine own.
The phantom shapes of fear are far remov'd
From this fair scene. And thy stern father's foes
Will seek thee not in this secluded spot.
Look at me, Aslog !—These are indeed the eyes
Of her—thy mother Brynhild, and again they live
With all their trustfulness and truth, in thee.
This too is Sigurd's face—and Brynhild's face
Here join'd, as music's notes, in harmony,
Which struck together make their sweetness one.
Look at me, Aslog !—and so hear my words
That they shall rest for ever in thy heart
Like rocks which lie embedded in the sea.

Time's hand hath dimm'd mine eyes, made white my
And now ere long will lead me to the grave : [hairs,
My journey and its toil are nearly o'er.
When death's long night shall close this dusk of life
And wrap me in its slumbers undisturb'd,
Thou, Aslog, in the morning sun of youth
Which gladdens all the earth with happy smiles,
Wilt be without me. And my helping hand
Can then no longer be outstretch'd to thee.
On that day, Aslog, think of these my words,
And let each deed in life their spirit bear.
He who is highly born must nobly live,
For all his actions good and evil both
Are shewn reflected clear in ev'ry pool ;
And all his errors though they be but slight
Are made more glaring by a thousand tongues,

Until oft-times they lose their natural shape,
And he, who made them, knoweth them no more,
So alter'd, and distorted have they grown.
Forget not, Aslog, then, thine own high birth ;
Remember that thou e'er must nobly live—
As nobly in thy thoughts as in thy deeds,
For each thought leaves its footprints on the face—
Thus is the face of man his outward mind !

Look down, O Balder, on this child ! Send forth
Thy gladsome light to penetrate her heart,
That all the world may read its purity,
And all the world may know her noble birth !—
Now Aslog mine, the evening stars I see,
And thou must lay thy head on slumber's breast.

*(He places her in the harp again. He then gathers some sticks
and lights a fire, over which he warms his hands.)*

Brynhild and Sigurd are dead !
Can I believe it and think it ?
This is the cruellest of sorrows,
This is the heart of misfortune !
Blows which bring grief to the spirit,
Blows which are crushing and fearful
Bring incredulity with them :
Man cannot grasp at their meaning.
Time is the touch which enlightens :
Time brings reluctant belief.

Brynhild and Sigurd are dead !
And the world is unalter'd, unchangèd :
Nature is calm, and is peaceful—
Nature knows nothing of sorrow !

The birds sing their songs of the morning,
Songs which are joyful and thoughtless ;
The sun shines in dazzling splendour.
The breezes are pure and refreshing !
And heroes may suffer and perish—
And Nature is joyous, contented !

Brynhild and Sigurd are dead !
Balder, forget not their offspring !
Breathe in her heart all their virtues—
Let not their nobleness perish !
Mingle these virtues together
Make them as one in her spirit—
Give her that loftiest courage
Whose face evil eyes cannot look on !
Give her that sweetness and pureness
Which stifle the breath of corruption.

Grant her, O Balder, these blessings
That sunshine may gild her life's path-way ;
For happiness springs but from virtue,
And joy gives its crown to the noble.

The evening ripens and I now must seek
Some shelter for the night which is at hand.

(Enter Aké and Grima—as if passing through the forest.)

Stay friends !—if friends ye are—and say if ye
Can offer me protection for this night.

Grima—My lord, we are not bless'd with worldly goods,
And poverty has ever been our guest ;
But if thou canst contented be to share
Our gloomy hut—thou art full welcome to.

Heimer—I thank thee woman. Is the distance great?

Aké—Not so, my lord. Our hut is close at hand.

Heimer—Then thankfully will I go with thee, friends.
But first, let once again these welcome flames
Their warmth unselfish give mine aged hands.

(Heimer kneels down before the fire, and spreads his hands over it. He appears lost in thought. His back is turned to Aké and Grima.)

Grima—Aké, my thoughts are deep. Hast thou thy sword?

Aké—Canst thou not see it hanging at my side?

Grima—Then test the strength and value of the steel!
Fortune hath wings and ever is in flight;
To-day she tarries at our very feet,
Though but to get her lost breath back again—
Be quicker than her breathing-time—and strike!

Aké—What profit, Grima, shall we find in this?

Grima—Hast thou not seen the ring upon his arm,
Which is of gold? And look at yonder harp,
Which doubtless hides some treasure from our view,
For at the base of it, there is a door.

Aké—He whom thou bidst me slay, I am assur'd,
Is highly born. And like some ghostly shape
Fear stands before me with its icy breath,
Which seems to freeze the blood within my veins.

Grima—Put fear behind thee till the deed be done,
And seek for courage, whose unflinching face

No shrinking cowardice can e'er behold.
Strike! and pluck Fortune's flow'r before it fade!

(With a sudden resolution Aké rushes up to Heimer and plunges his sword into his back. The old man falls dead to the ground. Aké then opens the door of the harp, out of which Aslog steps. She runs to Heimer lying on the ground, and calls him by his name. When she sees he does not move, and notices the blood upon the ground, she falls sobbing on his breast. Aké and Grima look on dumfounded.)

Aké—That voice, which often stays a wicked hand
And aids man's strength to master self-desire,
Now speaks within me words of stern reproach.
Too late it comes! O had it curs'd the thought
To do this sin, before it curs'd the deed!

A victory o'er virtue is defeat—
And I have long fought this correcting voice,
And silenced, but too well, its warning words!
Thus Failure came—disguis'd—cloth'd like Success,
And now too late I see mine own deceit.

Grima—Se'st thou this child?—Mark me, it must not live.
Death hath no tongue and cannot speak of this.

Aké—Give not such counsel! I despise thy words.
This were too terrible and black a deed!
Can darkness join'd to darkness lead to light?
Can crime repeated bring forth innocence?
Repentance is the road which guilt must tread;
Repentance heals the bleeding wounds of sin.
The child shall live, and be thy care and mine
And we will look upon her as our own.

The light of goodness and of chastity
Play lovingly upon the childish face,
And we will ever tarry by her side,
That we may feel their peaceful influence.
Perchance from out the frowning clouds of guilt,
One little sunbeam yet may find its way
And fall upon our heads, and bring us grace.

There is no night which ne'er shall know a morn,
The blackest heart shall one day see the light.

END OF PROLOGUE.

SCENE I.

(Another part of the forest ; Akk's and Grima's hut (R). The sea can be seen in the distance. Aslog is sitting beside a brook and gazing into it.

Fifteen years have elapsed since the period of the prologue.)

Aslog—Answer me, stream, running clear—

Thou who reflectest but truth ;
Do I not see in thy waves
The form of my mother again ?
Is not my face like to hers ?
She, whom the world highly priz'd ?
Tell me, O murmuring stream,
Whisper thine answer to me !

(She springs up with energy.)

Would that my mind and my heart
Like were to Brynhilds' and Sigurds' !

Brynhild, my heroine mother—
Glorious Sigurd, my father !
Sigurd—the hero of heroes—
Brynhild, the noblest of women—
Ne'er shall their names be forgotten !
Time's hand shall never destroy them.

(She sits down by the stream again.)

Honour and courage make the perfect man,
And he who has them both can fight the world,
And crush beneath his feet all meaner men
Whose hearts are blacken'd with their low desires,
Corrupted by their own ignobleness,
And weaken'd by their reverence of self !
O father ! is it wrong to think of thee
With pride—which brings the sunbeams to my heart
And makes its beating full of stronger life ?
Or wouldst thou have me meek and hang my head
When pow'rs unseen attract my thoughts to thee ?
Not so, my father, all the world shall feel
That thrill of pride at mention of thy name !
And ages yet unborn shall speak of thee
And sing thy praises in unending song :
Thus are men reverenc'd whose worthy deeds
Rise up as mountains from the even ground,
And standing clearly forth against the sky
Seem as a link between the gods and man !

A great example has eternal life ;
And Sigurd's noble acts shall e'er withstand
The flames of Time which burn up lesser things.

(She starts up again from her position by the stream.)

O father! shall I ne'er behold those scenes,
Ne'er see the world in which thou liv'dst and died?
Must I for ever here remain in chains,
And never feel the breath of Freedom's air?
There is a beauty in these forest glades
To eyes which ne'er before have look'd on them;
But mine are weary with these unchang'd scenes,
And all their loveliness I see no more!

Could I but leave these shores and sail away
Over the bosom of the ocean deep,
And seek out other lands, joy and content
Would rest with me, and dwell within my heart.
But here amidst these still and peaceful scenes,
I find no pleasure in an unearn'd rest.
Repose makes smooth the furrow'd brow of Toil,
And paints the smile of peace upon its face;
But he who ne'er has known the trials of life
Or felt the iron-like grip of labour's hand,
Finds no perfection in a land of quiet,
And never knows the blessings of repose.
Thus, it were better, not to tarry here;
For life, made one unending holiday
Must cast away its own best qualities,
And so become a foe unto itself!

There is a spirit in my heart to-day
Which seems to bid me wake to newer life.
I feel, as if, my father, thou wert here,
And laid thy hands unseen upon my head
And whisper'd words of counsel in mine ear—
So strongly are my heart and mind to-day
Made conscious of some powerful influence.

Does this not mean my road of earthly life
Which hitherto so evenly has run,
And ever pass'd beneath a cloudless sky,
Shall now desert these scenes of peacefulness
And lead me forward over rougher ground,
To test and prove the sureness of my feet?
If all my thoughts, my father, now of thee
Mean this, then it is well ; I am prepar'd.

A life which ne'er knows sorrow ne'er knows joy :
It is the storm which gives full glory to the sun,
When all the blacken'd clouds have roll'd away.
It is the wintry blast which makes the spring
The season when the heart of man is glad.

(She looks towards the shore).

Do mine eyes cheat me, or deceive me not?
Am I awake, or is this all a dream?
Are these not sails that flutter in the breeze?
Are these not ships now lying by the shore?
Mine eyes the truth declare ; I now see men—
They leave the boats and spring upon the land.
How brightly shines the sun upon their shields
And glitters on their helmets and their swords!
Some now ascend the hill. A moment hence
They will be here. Shall I remain,
Or go within the hut till they are gone?
Not so !—I will await them, for I feel this day
Is as a crisis hanging o'er my head,
Which shall its clouds of doubt unfold to me
And bring me joyfulness or misery.

(Enter Agnar and a few of the men from the ship.)

Agnar—Good morrow, maiden. Is this hut thine own?
And can we pass within to bake our bread?

Aslog—The hut to one named Aké does belong,
But you may come within to do your will.

(Agnar and the few men who have come with him go into the hut with Aslog.)

(King Ragnor, Eric and the remainder of the men now come up from the ship.)

Ragnor—Now once again our feet touch solid ground,
And we may rest awhile upon these shores.
How beautiful are all these verdant trees
To eyes too much accusom'd to the deeps!
When Nature rests her hand on wearied sight
The very touch can make it young again,
And all the green things of this pleasant land
Invite the vision to partake of rest.

(He turns to Eric.)

Are Agnar and the men that went with him
To bake the bread—now gone within this hut?

Eric—Methinks I saw them enter with a maid
As we, a moment since, came up the hill.

(Agnar comes out of the hut.)

Agnar—O father! I am come in quest of thee!—
A maid more perfect and more beautiful
Than any I have ever yet beheld,
Stands now within the precincts of this hut.

The men forget their work and look on her
And seem as if a spell were over them.

(He comes nearer to Ragnar.)

O father ! I have long been conscious of
The secret wish that lies within thy heart,
But which thou never yet hast cloth'd in words.
Long have I known that since the dreary day
When she, our mother, Thora left thy side
And clos'd her eyes in death's most beauteous sleep,
Thou hast not been thine own true self again,
For sorrow's hand hath wrinkl'd deep thy brow
As frosts make harden'd ruts within the ground—
The summer of thy life hath pass'd away
And winter, with its cold and smileless face
Breathes on thy heart and freezes all its joys.

Ragnar—Speak on my son. O well hast thou divin'd
The grief which long has lain within my breast.

Agnar—The sharpest and the cruelest winter blast
Is ever conquer'd by the smile of spring ;
And ev'ry sorrow of the human heart
Shall one day know a soothing influence
To melt away its icicles of grief.
A spring-like sun, my father, now, for thee
Is rising in a clear and cloudless sky—
Look up, and let it shine upon thy heart
And free for ever all its ice-bound woe !

Ragnar—What meanest thou?—thy words are as a cloak
Which hides beneath its folds some deeper sense,
And are but as the daylight to the sun
When clouds obscure the sun itself from view.

Agnar—This—father—is the meaning of my words :
I would that thou would'st look upon this maid,
And if thou canst find beauty in her form
And in her mind—to take her for thy queen ;
That she may be a comfort to thy heart
And bring again the joys of life to thee !

She who is dead was nobleness itself,
And ow'd her beauty to her heart within,
Whose goodness brought the sunshine to her face.
But nobleness and worth have ever life,
And death's chill hand can lead them to no grave.
They live eternally, and ev'ry man,
Through countless ages—in a thousand lands—
Can, if he will, command them to himself,
To give him strength to fight the war of life
And aid him in the victory o'er sin.
Now, mark me, father, I am well assur'd
From ev'ry look upon this maiden's face,
And ev'ry word that I have heard her speak,
That all our mother's noblest qualities
Dwell in her heart and live again in her !

Ragnor—Can I believe this world of sin so rich
In all the highest virtues of mankind,
That there can still another woman be
Equal to Thora in her heart and mind,
And yet possess'd of outward loveliness ?
Could I but think it, joy indeed were mine,
For I would make her willingly my queen.

Thy words, my son, have ever weight with me,
For never do they form an idle speech.
Their worth is in the thought which gives them birth,

Aslog—Alas ! I could not tell thee so, with truth,
True happiness I never yet have known.
Aké and Grima, sire, they love me not
And where no love is, there does sorrow dwell.

*Aké and Grima come out of the hut, and stand among Ragnor's
men who do not notice them. They are unperceived by
Ragnor and Aslog.)*

Ragnor—Come hither, Kraka ; let me speak to thee
More privately, and for thyself alone.

There is a charm in thee, my gentle maid,
Which speaks to me and whispers to my heart.
I know thee not, I scarce have view'd thy face,
And yet I can but think I know thee well.
Some natures ever hide and cloak themselves
So that their outward forms alone appear ;
But thine, sweet Kraka, wears no covering,
And no deceitful mask disguises it.
Thy heart is in thine eyes and in thy speech,
And fearlessly, courageously stands forth
Before the searching eyes of all the world.

Thus dost thou show me thine own truest self,
Which aids thy beauty in its influence
To sow the seed of love within my heart,
And some strong pow'r now draws my heart to thine !
Hang not thy head, but look into mine eyes,
And hear me, gentle Kraka, to the end.
My hearth is lonely, for the wife I lov'd
More than the countless treasures of the earth,
Long since has left me for that night of rest
Which Death makes perfect by the crown of peace,

And cleanses from the world's disturbing dreams.
My sons have I, who bear me all their love,
For never am I absent from their thoughts ;
But man's affection and man's company
Likened to womans', are as barren rocks
Compar'd to Nature in luxuriance—
Or as the stiff and leafless winter trees
Seen in a land of brightest summer flow'rs.

Now is my heart like winter's rigid scene,
But all its summer verdure will return,
If thou canst soothe it with the smile of love,
And tell me that thy gentle heart is mine.

Aslog—I know thee not—I have not heard thy name ;
Thy face to me is now the first time seen.
But there is music in the air to-day
Which makes the sunlight brighter than before.
Music—for thou hast spoken words to me,
Which fill my heart with gladness and with joy
And all their meaning makes sweet harmony !
Does love's choice flow'r demand long years to grow ?
Does it not quickly spring from out the ground ?
I think it so—for love's most precious seed
Is ever sown within the youthful heart,
And when it feels the warming of the sun,
The seed breaks forth into the perfect flow'r.

My heart as long as I shall live is thine,
And all my life I dedicate to thee !

(She kneels at Ragnor's feet.)

Ragnor—Rise, gentle Kraka ! lean on Ragnor's arm,
And let him lead thee yonder to his ship.

Our hearts to-day are join'd and made as one,
And never shall an unkind influence
Destroy the union which is born of love !
As rocks withstand the fury of the sea,
So shall our hearts, now join'd, made doubly strong,
And aided by the strength each gives to each,
Withstand the angry tempests of the world !
Together shall we conquer them and live,
Or perish in their stormy waves and die !

O Agnar ! thou hast ever nobly liv'd,
And all thy life is bright with worthy deeds,
But this day sees the greatest of them all,
By thine unselfish thought and love for me.
Well have I said thy words to me bear weight,
For never do they form an idle speech ;
Well have I said thou would'st not raise thy voice
In praise of any being in the world
Unless thou knewest that such praise was just.
To-day all sorrow's clouds have roll'd away,
And all the brightness of the clear blue sky
Again brings joy triumphant to my heart !

O Kraka—may the light which shines in thee
And burns all thought of evil in its flame,
Find some reflection deep within myself,
That though my life be darken'd with its sin,
It yet shall bear some likeness to thine own—
To make me worthy of thy heart and love !

(END OF SCENE I.)

SCENE II.

*The Court of King Bele.**(King Bele and Ingeborg are alone.)*

Ingeborg—Hast thou no smile, my father, for this day
To give it greeting ?

Bele—No—I have not, child.
The thoughts which latterly have made themselves
The never-ceasing trouble of my mind,
Have cast on me the shadow of their gloom,
And all the happy hours that once were mine
Have gone from me, and know me now no more !

Ingeborg—Alas ! dear father, nought knew I of this—
Hast thou thy griefs then ? hast thou gloomy cares ?
And may a daughter's heart not share their weight,
That less may be the burden upon thine ?
O father ! do not hide thy griefs from me
Beneath the cloak of ever dark'ning frowns.
This is an hour for smiles—for mirth—for joy—
For great King Ragnor is thy guest to-day,
And even now the banquet is prepar'd.

Bele—My thoughts to-day are not in harmony
With those which bring the smiles upon the face.
Deeply they lie within my secret mind,
And thus my brow is cloth'd with sombreness
Which must, do what I will, remain with me
Until these thoughts bring forth their consequence.

Ingeborg—But tell me, father, what these thoughts may be ;
For I, as I have said, would share their weight.

Bele—Thou hast a lover—

Ingeborg—That can have no place
Within thy heart or mind, of consequence ;
Or else thy smiles would quickly smooth thy frown,
For gladness is the conqueror of gloom,
And thou hast said that thou are well content
With him who holds my happiness and love.

Bele—Come nearer, Ing'borg, for the words that I
Would speak with thee, are as my mind uncloth'd,
Stript of its covering and laid wholly bare
Before thine eyes, that all my very thoughts
May dwell with thee, as now they live in me.
The night which separates each day from each
And gives to rushing Toil its breathing time,
Can, in its hours of stillness and of calm,
Shake the resolvèd mind of yesterday
And point to errors as in mockery !
But yesterday thy choice brought joy to me,
Which all has vanish'd with the breath of night
And now my heart with gloominess is fill'd.

This lover merits not so fair a prize,
And he is low-born when compar'd to thee.
O Ingeborg, my pride is great to-day,
And I could wish to see thee nobly wed,
Rever'd, and lov'd, and honour'd—as a queen !
O would that thou King Ragnor's spouse couldst be—

Ingeborg—I cannot, father, for thou know'st full well
That Kraka is his queen.

Bele—A bondsman's child !—

Unworthy and unfit to share a throne.
And if my thoughts and schemes can serve him here
And help to raise his pride from out the dust,
They shall not fail to do so faithfully.

Ingeborg—How mean you father? what is done is done!
The bondsman's child has now become his queen,
And holds her head as high as does her lord.

Bele—That which is done is done—but all that is undone
Stands waiting patiently to be perform'd.
This matter hath call'd forth my deepest thoughts
And they have pierc'd the very heart of it.
No doubts have I that there are ways and means
To banish Kraka from King Ragnor's side,
And give to him a worthier, nobler queen,
And if my hand can lend him aid and strength,
As I have said, it shall be given him.
Misguided feet can tread on error's path,
But they may find the road of right again,
For there are paths to lead them back to it.
And Ragnor, though he carelessly hath stray'd
From that true course which greatness should pursue,
Shall, by my succour, find it once again.
The garments which the mire has stain'd and soil'd,
Though they be cover'd with the foulest earth,
Can yet once more be cleans'd and purified.
And Ragnor's garments, soil'd by this false love,
Unworthy of his birth and kingly rank,
Shall yet again be spotless and made pure.
And as the snow blots out the blackest earth
And hides it with its robe of beauteous white,

My help and aid shall cover Ragnor's fault
That all his people feel its shame no more !

Now Ingeborg, thou knowest well the cause
Of this deep gloom which hangs upon my brow,
And now my heart speaks clearly to thine own,
And asks of thee the sacrifice of love.

Some pow'r which deep within my breast
Has peacefully and ever dormant lain,
To-day is fill'd with all the breath of life,
And in my heart and mind its spirit breathes,
And bids me leave the easier paths of life
Which pass but over smooth and level ground—
Where barren wastes abound—devoid of fruit
To give the mind of man its nourishment—
And with fix'd purpose seek that rugged track,
Which passing over crags, yet finds its way
Up the steep side of great Ambition's mount,
Whose unseen summit man shall never gain.

Look up into mine eyes, sweet Ingeborg,
And tell me if thy heart now beats with mine,
And shares its purposes and high desires !
Wilt thou not link thy gentle hand in mine—
That I may guide thee o'er this dangerous track
Which none should tread unaided and alone !
Wilt thou not banish from thy heart this man
Who is unworthy of thy noble love,
And, with my help, become King Ragnor's queen ?

Ingeborg—If, father, I accede to thy desire,
And crush from out my heart my burning love,

And make my will so liken'd to thine own
That its reflection it shall seem to thee—
Will all this gloom which now o'erhangs thy brow,
And which proclaims a mind of discontent,
Vanish like night before the rising sun,
And pass, like morning mists, to nothingness?
If such a service I could render thee
By this renunciation of my love,
The sacrifice, thou askest, now is made,
And self no longer in my heart shall reign.

Bele—O Ingeborg—if thou wilt lend thine aid,
And help me in the schemes which I have made
To gild the pathway of thy future life,
My brow shall nurse no more its frowning gloom,
And joy and gladness I shall know again.

Ingeborg—Then, father, is thy will indeed mine own,
And at thy word love dies within my heart,
And though it brings me sorrow, perishes.
But all the truest love I bear for thee,
Love which is stronger and more powerful
Than love that is but born of selfishness,
Shall fight in duty's name against my grief
And conquer utterly my self-desires :
For ev'ry sorrow which is error's child
Slumbers in death when duty breathes on it.

O now, indeed, my grief has pass'd away,
For there are smiles upon thy face again,
And ever have I loved to share with thee
The joys and sorrows of thine inmost heart !

Bele—O Ingeborg, my heart goes out to thee,

And now I love thee more than e'er before,
For now thy courage proves thy noble birth.
At last thy character reveals itself,
And in the light of day stands fearlessly
That all may see its stainlessness and worth !

Now listen, Ingeborg, and mark me well
A moment hence and Ragnor will be here
For now approacheth the appointed time !
This is the day which I have plann'd for thee
That thou mayst influence King Ragnor's heart,
And waken in his breast a nobler love
Than that which now keeps Kraka by his side.
Let not the hour which fortune makes our own,
To bring us nearer to the goal we seek,
Be one of indolence and idle cares !
In ev'ry life of man there comes a time
When he is moved to do some worthy deed
That to the tree of labour shall bear fruit !
And if the deed be done, then fortune smiles,
And smooths the road which leads to greater things ;
But if the deed by him be not perform'd
Then rage and anger rise in Fortune's breast,
And wrathfully she casts before his feet
Stones which shall make him stumble till he fall ;
And oftentimes she hurls him down some pit,
Where struggling in the mire he perishes,
Unknown, deserted, friendless, and unlov'd !
O Ingeborg ! that fate shall not be thine !
To-day this deed which lies within thy grasp
Shall by thy doing profit bring to thee,
And lead thee onward to these greater things,
Guided by Duty, and by Fortune's hand.

Smile and be merry when King Ragnor comes,
For there is beauty in a laughing eye,
And ev'ry woman addeth to her charms
When there is joy and mirth upon her face.
Let thine eyes wait with patience upon his,
That ev'ry time his face be turn'd to thee,
He shall not fail to feel some influence,
Some pow'r, which lying hidden in thyself,
Speaks through thine eyes and makes its meaning clear.
Open thy heart, O Ingeborg, for these
Mine earnest words, that they have weight with thee,
And help thee when thou hearest them no more !

Ingeborg—Their spirit shall rest ever in my breast ;
And as the sun assists all Nature's growth
And by its warmth gives life to all the world,
These valu'd words shall lie within my heart,
And they shall change my weakness into strength.
O father ! much hangs on this day
And half its burden seeks for my support,
But all its cares hast thou made light for me,
Because in bearing them, they fight thy gloom
And take away thy mind's perplexity.
Now Ragnor comes—I hear the steeds below—
O Balder !—let not courage leave my side
That I may gain the victory I seek—
And by the conquest, father, give to thee
A mind of peacefulness and quietude,
Which ne'er shall know again the storms of life,
And ne'er be shadow'd by its discontent !

END OF SCENE II.

SCENE III.

The Court of King Ragnor. King Ragnor is alone.

Ragnor—Was ever there a day like unto this?
So black, so foul, and so unlike itself,
That I could fancy it were darkest night!
And yet the skies are blue—the sun shines forth
And birds are singing their accustom'd songs,
And all the world proclaims to me its joy,
To fill my heart with envy and with hate,
Because its gladness has gone out from it.
O mocking sun! why look'st thou down on me?
I have no smile to give thee in return
For all the glory of thy gladsome light.
Withdraw thy face—and roll up darkening clouds
That fiercest storms may devastate the land,
And ev'ry man may feel the misery
Which now, like some huge monster, open-jaw'd
Gnaws without pity at mine aching heart!

O conscience speak! condemn or praise mine acts,
For darkness lies between me and the light,
And now I feel I know myself no more!
A mind in search of truth is one disturb'd
And restless as the ocean in the storm.
O could I clearly look into my heart
That I might see if there be wrong therein,
And crush that spirit bearing evil thoughts
Which all too quickly change themselves to deeds,
And leave a stain which time can ne'er remove—
But I to-day am rather as one blind
Who, groaning in the darkness, seeks for light.

O Ingeborg, had I not seen thy face
And read its beauty all might now be well—
O Bele, hadst thou not taunted me
And ask'd of me, if e'er a bondsman's child
Was worthy to be great King Ragnor's queen,
My mind and heart might now enjoy repose.
But like the fire which in the mountain's breast
Burns ever fiercely and unceasingly,
This taunt is burning peace from out my mind,
And rising from its ashes, comes forth pride.

(With resolution.)

Now must my heart be purified again
By rooting out the love which Kraka sow'd ;
And which so falsely deck'd in robes of joy
Has cloth'd me with the darkness of my grief.

(Enter Eric.)

Hail! Eric, hail!—give welcome to this day!
This day of days whose sunlight melts our woe.
Smile and be happy, for I breathe again
The air which Freedom's breath hath purified.
But yesterday, I lay as one entomb'd,
Or as a prisoner fast bound with chains ;
To-day these chains are torn from off my feet,
Unbarr'd and open stands the prison door,
And now no more is there necessity
To groan and perish in a dungeon's air.

Eric—Is this the day, when Ingeborg shall come,
And Kraka shall be cast away from thee ?

Ragnor—Rightly thou sayest. Ingeborg this day
Shall raise me from the mire where I have lain,
Too fearful of myself to face the world,
Which turns its eyes from men of high degree
When stains destroy their robes of purity.
But, Ingeborg, by all her noblest love
Shall make my blacken'd garments white again.
Eric, rejoice, for now the rising sun
Pours forth his light upon our night of shame,
Which, like the foe when vanquish'd, flees from us.

To-day a nobler, worthier queen
Shall make the hearts of all my people glad.
Here Kraka cometh. Send her unto me ;
Within my chamber will I wait for her.

(*Exit.*)

Enter Aslog.

Spak'st thou a moment since unto the king ?

Eric—Aye, Kraka. And he bids thee follow him
Unto his chamber, where he waits for thee.

Aslog—O Eric, frown not ! look not so on me,
For frowns are coverings to hide dark thoughts,
And are the inner mind's disguising masks,
Which mock the eyes of Truth, who stands in doubt.
O frown not, Eric, be not harsh to me,
For grief has made mine aching heart its own,
And all the pleasures of my youth are gone.
Cast off the mask which hides thy mind from me,
And let me look upon thy truest self.
Thy father and my husband dearly lov'd—
O tell me, Eric, has he not of late

Been changèd towards me? O thou knowest well
The smile of love has faded from his face ;
And in his eyes the world must see the hate
Which gleams in them whene'er he looks on me.
Hast thou no answer?—canst thou nothing say
To raise the burden of these torturing doubts,
Which press so heavily upon my heart
That they must crush the spirit of my love.

Eric—Would I could answer thee as thou couldst wish,
But woe is me, truth breathes upon thy fears
And to thy mind's dark shadows giveth life.

Aslog—Then hath his love all pass'd away from me?
That love whose sweet existence gave mine birth !
O Eric, falsehood's tongue hath whisper'd in his ear
And falsehood's voice hath echo'd in his heart,
And, by deceit, hath driven out his love ;
For there is nothing that is chang'd in me,
And all my love, in spite of this cruel wrong,
Which adds a sharpness to that sharpest sword
Held by Injustice—in my heart lives yet ;
Though like the fire, which dies for want of fuel,
My once bright flames of love now burn but low,
And ev'ry flicker seems a fight with death !

(*Re-enter Ragnor.*)

Ragnor—Eric, what means this? why comes Kraka not?
Hast thou not told her I awaited her ?

Eric—Thus have I spoken to her.

Ragnor—Leave us then !
My mind can here full well declare itself.

(*Exit Eric.*)

Why camest thou not Kraka, to my side
When Eric told thee I had summon'd thee ?
O now the darkness fades before mine eyes,
And conquering light makes whole mine erring sight.
Now can I look so clearly in thy heart,
That I can see its blacken'd treachery
Which, like a mountain shadowing fair scenes,
Stands forth to mock thine ever virtuous tongue,
And casts its shadow o'er thy virtuous self !

Aslog—Thou seest treachery within my heart !
O where my lord have I been false to thee ?

Ragnor—False in thy heart and treacherous in thy love
Which but a cruel boast has prov'd itself,
And which began and ended in thy words
And touch'd no deeper chord within thy breast.
These latter days hast thou been chang'd to me,
And love's bright smile has faded from thy face,
Which now like very marble has become,
So cold is it and so devoid of life.
Time can alone the worth of things proclaim,
And if they cannot bear that surest test
They are, in truth, of little excellence.
Behold thy love !—where is its value now ?
Alas ! Time proved too strong an enemy,
And all thy heart's affection it has slain.
But do I taunt thee for thy weaknesses ?
Are these my words the words of cruel reproach ?
Forgive me, Kraka ! thou deserv'dst them not !
Wert thou of noble or of royal birth,
The blood within thy veins would shape thy course
And never let thee stray from honour's path ;

But thou, alas ! art but a bondman's child,
And thou hast well proclaim'd thy humble birth.

Aslog—Now truth and justice have deserted thee,
And all the balance of thy mind is gone !

Ragnor—Justice deserted me ! O wrong me not—
This day shall Justice speak her truest word,
And free me from the chains which thou hast wrought
To bind me to thine own ignoble self.
This day shall perish all our falsest love,
As blight before a purifying storm ;
And nobler, truer love shall fill my heart
And calm the spirit of my troubl'd mind.
Our discontent is e'er the thief of peace,
But when again our hearts are satisfied
And fill'd with perfect love, then peace returns
And throws its glory o'er each hour of life.
O Ingeborg ! I thank thee for this day,
And for the love which thou hast promis'd me !

(Enter Eric and Agnar, and the Court of Ragnor.)

Agnar—King Bele, and Princess Ingeborg approach !

Ragnor—'Tis well ! O soon shall all the sunshine of my joy
Make warm my heart and melt its ev'ry grief !

Friends—I would speak to all of you to-day,
For on my mind a heavy burden rests,
And speech relieves the troubles of the mind.
A sin, which merits but your angry words
Of stern reproof—has stain'd the name I bear ;
A bondsman's daughter have I made your queen.

But though the crimes of man be e'er so black,
And though he fall into the mire of sin,
And seemingly can raise himself no more,
If he repent, the sickness of his mind
Shall pass from him, and over firmer ground
Shall lie the future journey of his life,
Where neither bog nor mire shall clog his feet ;
The seed of my repentance I have sown,
And all this day shall know my words are truth.

(Enter King Bele and Ingeborg.)

Hail, noblest Bele—and welcome Ingeborg—
Thou com'st with smiles upon thy gentle face
To make my heart as young as thine in joy.
O look, my people, on this fairest maid,
For this is she who now shall be your queen ;
And she is worthy of my heart and love
And worthy of the homage of you all.

(Aslog has been standing among the people. She now comes forward.)

Aslog—Now must I speak !—too long have I been dumb,
For by my silence, none have heard truth's voice,
And all thy words, O King, has error rul'd.
To these thy people hast thou made it known
That I, their queen, am but a bondsman's child.
No falser declaration e'er was made,
For I can say with truth unto you all
That but the purest blood flows in these veins,
And that I am of noble, royal birth !

Agnar—Have I not said it? Have I e'er believ'd

That such an one could e'er be humbly born ;
O joy is there to find my judgment strong !

Eric—Speak on, sweet Kraka, for thou canst not yet
Have told us all thy heart must bid thee say.

(The people murmur—Aslog is about to speak.)

Ragnor—Be silent all !—for this was I prepared ;
And I have clear'd my road of stumbling blocks—
Aké and Grima !—bring them unto me.

*(Aké and Grima are brought in. They are very poorly clad
and present a strange contrast to the rich garments of
Ragnor and his Court.)*

Ragnor (scornfully)—Now, rush sweet Kraka, to thy mother's
arms
And there find joy !—Fall on thy father's neck
And happiness shall come to thee again.
O look you friends upon this beauteous pair,
For Kraka is the daughter of these two ;
And truly has she boasted of her birth
And of the purest blood within her veins !

Aké—Not so, O King—no truth lies in thy words—
For never have we known a daughter's love !

Ragnor—What sayst thou !—I understand thee not.
Thou never hadst a daughter !—Speak then, man—
And say how Kraka cam'st to dwell with thee.

Aké—Now will I lift the burden from my mind
Which long has lain so heavily on it.
O there is punishment for those who hide

The burning light of truth within themselves—
For never dies the torture of its flame,
Which day and night destroys the mind's repose.
Perchance my words shall find their goal in death,
But death were welcome for its breath is peace,
And I am yet more fearful of a life
Stung by a conscience that can never rest.

List then, O King, to these my words of truth.
Once, in the forest, where I long have dwelt
An aged man ask'd shelter for the night.
Rich were his garments and of costly stuff,
And on his arm he wore a ring of gold.
A beauteous harp he carried ; and I saw
That at its base a door there was to it.
Some treasure hides he in this harp, methought,
And doubtless he is carrying much wealth.
Then came the thought to do the wicked deed
Which on my wretched life has left its curse.
To steal his gold from him—I kill'd the man.

I knew not then his name—but I have learnt
That it was good King Heimer whom I slew.

Agnar—King Heimer ! O it was he, O King,
Who from the wrath of Sigurd's enemies
Fled with his daughter that she might not share
The fate her father suffer'd.

Ragnor—Man, say on.
Thou speakest of the crime which thou hast done,
And thou art pardon'd for thy cruel deed,
Because of the repentance of thy heart.
But where does this touch Kraka's history ?

Aké—My crime, O King, hath changèd Kraka's life ;
 King Heimer slain—and ere remorse had come—
 My thoughts were on the treasure I had gain'd :
 I seiz'd the harp and open flung its door.
 The prize which I had won was not of gold :
 Within the harp a little child I found.
 That child, O King, has liv'd to be thy queen,
 And this is she who now before me stands.

Agnar—Then she, O father, who didst win thy love,—
 Not by the boasting of a noble birth
 But by the higher nobleness of self—
 The child of Sigurd and of Brynhild is !
 And Aslog is the name that she was call'd !

Aké—We call'd her Kraka, knowing not her name.

Aslog—O Ragnor, now thou seest thou hast err'd
 And that Injustice in thy heart has crept,
 To stealthily destroy thy love for me.
 Now seest thou that I have reverenc'd
 The light of Truth, which surely guides our feet
 When we are lost in darkness and in gloom.
 Thou hast denounc'd me as a bondsman's child ;
 O now thou know'st the falseness of thy words,
 And thou must understand how deep a rent
 Such bitterness has cut into my heart.

(As if to herself.)

My father !—thou hast look'd on me this day,
 For I can feel thy courage in my breast,
 And it has strengthen'd me against these wrongs,
 And taught me how to bear my sufferings.
 And thou, my mother, also hast been near,
 For I have felt thine influence in me :

And woman's tenderness and woman's love
Remain unconquer'd by all harsher thoughts.

O Ragnor, had I but told thee all
When first I saw thee and I gain'd thy love,
Had I but told thee of my royal birth,
The errors of this day had been unborn !
In this I feel that I have done much wrong,
For all the clouds of trouble and of woe,
Which now hang heavily above our heads,
I, by this injury to thee and thine,
Have helped to gather in their frowning mass.
For this my sin, I ask of thee thy grace,
That lesser be the weight of sorrow's hand,
Whose touch is yet more cruel than that of death !

The love I bore thee, Ragnor, liveth yet,
And it shall e'er withstand the trial of time—
But thine has wither'd and is surely dead.
O let me then return unto the wood
Where thou didst find me, that my days may end
Surrounded by the scenes I lov'd in youth.
For while I linger here I cause but grief,
And I am but the queen of misery.

Ragnor (to Bele)—Release me from the compact we have made
Which thus has brought dishonour on ourselves.

Bele—Thou art releas'd !—O Ragnor we have sinn'd—
But there is yet the time to cleanse our hearts.

(Ragnor kneels at the feet of Aslog.)

Ragnor—I am the sinner who hath done this wrong,
And at thy feet I kneel to ask thy grace !

O Aslog ! all thine acts are cloth'd in white,
And mine are blacken'd with impurity.
Thou art the light of truth which I have lost,
And I have wander'd in the dark of night,
With but the evil spirit of my mind
To lead me on to ruin and to death.
But there was never yet so deep a gloom
That was not vanquish'd by triumphant light,
And thou hast rais'd the shadows from mine eyes
That I might see the ground on which I stood,
And learn to hate the foulness of such soil.
O Aslog ! thou hast said thy love lives yet,
And thou hast fear'd that mine for thee was dead ;
But though my heart but lately seem'd a stone,
Now does it beat again for thee of old ;
O grant to me the grace that I have ask'd,
For death were welcome if thou giv'st it not,
And in thy love I find the breath of life !

*(Aslog cannot speak, but she stretches out her hand to Ragnar
and they are reconciled.)*

Agnar—The clouds have broken forth—the storm has pass'd,
And there is sunshine in all hearts again.
The glory of the day is made by night,
And man rejoices in the rising sun ;
And thus the dawn brings comfort to these hearts
And casts their sufferings of night away.
But their distress has more than prov'd their love,
Which must endure unbroken unto death.
O now the gods have visited the earth—
To show that right e'er triumphs over wrong,
To prove that noblest love e'er conquers all !





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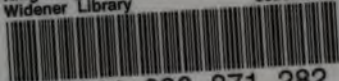
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